

Getting Behind Our Labels

It's a bit difficult to keep up with the recent labels popping up across our mission enterprise. Organizations are re-branding themselves to fit a different generation, and each new model of ministry receives its own unique tag. We get impatient with terms that fail to capture the shifting realities we face in mission today, so we jigger them to fit our fresh perception. "Global" edges out "world," "narrative" takes precedence over "worldview," and "intercultural" is safer than "mission." One suspects that a new label is just the tip of an iceberg, that all this relabeling is symptomatic of a deeper unease in the way we think missiologically.

This unease could be felt at the 40th anniversary meeting of the American Society of Missiology (ASM).¹ Keynote speakers identified two forces that will bend the way we classify mission in the future. The first pressure point is from the Global South. In his prophetic address, African missiologist Jehu Hanceles hinted at three ways a relabeling was already underway. First of all, he mentioned the "bad titles" of seminary courses across Africa as one indicator that Western theological categories no longer correlate with the present realities of mission. It was part of his plea for a missiological scholarship that reflects non-Western priorities and the releasing of Africans and Asians to re-classify and re-label with integrity. Secondly, he suggested that the increasing global proximity of world religions requires us to pay more attention to the sociology of religion than to our traditional use of anthropology. Prioritizing a new discipline would require a whole new classification scheme that would generate new terms. It would certainly disturb taken-for-granted older labels. Thirdly, he anticipates new terminology to emerge where our Asian brethren are rethinking the relation of Christianity and world religions from their own indigenous vantage point. Undergirding Hanceles' entire appeal was his ironclad belief that Western categories and the corresponding labels will not suffice.

The second pressure point is from the Global North. New labels like "emergent" and "missional"—and neologisms like "post-evangelical" and "post-Constantinian"—indicate that a paradigm shift is taking place. Dwight Zscheile assessed the factors that constrain the missiology of a new generation in America. He claims that this "nomadic" generation is answering Jesus' question, "Who is my neighbor?" a bit differently. They're reclassifying difference and otherness in a more collaborative and participative manner, using labels like "faithful presence" to

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overcome the older Constantinian categories of power, control and elitism.² This generation doesn't answer the question, "Who are we in God?" with the same old categories, but prefers to reclassify their priorities when forming and restoring communities of faith. These Global North conditions aren't universal, but they're certainly a force affecting our missiology in the West.

With these contemporary influences in mind, the *IJFM* wanted to look behind some of the labels we use. Each article in this issue examines the concepts and models underneath labels like *insider*, *CPM* (*church planting movements*), *discipleship*, *religion*, and *evangelical*. The first two articles look particularly at the use of the term *socio-religious* and its attempt to describe the blending of culture and religion. Daniels and Waterman (p. 59) try to sort out the apparent confusion and reaction triggered by this term, and while you might not share their conclusions, we applaud their effort to get behind the term. Waterman offers a *singular* biblical category of "religion," while Harley Talman indicates a clear *duality* to the classification of religion in his study

of the Old Testament (p. 49), a duality that fits the socio-religious experience of insider movements.

Years ago Paul Hiebert steered our thinking to the models that lie beneath the language of mission. New books by Patrick Krayer and Edward Rommen expose how models of sexuality and liturgy can affect mission practice (see ads, p. 46), and Krayer especially exhorts us to emulate Paul's sensitivity to culturally-embedded models (see review, p. 88).

The models behind the methods we use in ministry—and the deeper categories we use to evaluate those models—are often not so apparent to us. Ted Esler has disclosed the underlying model of church planting we label "CPM" by offering a clear comparison with the priorities that still drive a more traditional model (p. 67). Larry Caldwell turns to Hiebert's use of "set theory" in order to get beneath our evangelical disagreements (p. 75). Models lie deep in our thinking, and our categories even deeper, but they could determine how progressive or conservative we are when it comes to any new label or term

introduced into missiological discourse. We hope these articles will help us to be more aware of the significance of the new nomenclature arising across the missions landscape. And in future issues we will continue to explore the deeper presuppositions that we use in evaluating missions today. Speaking of the future, we have some exciting issues lined up as we accelerate the process of getting the *IJFM* current again. We'll be bringing you articles from the recent ISFM meetings in Dallas and Korea, a special retrospective on "giants of missiology" who have gone before us, and much more. Stay tuned.

In Him,



Brad Gill
Editor, *IJFM*

Endnotes

¹ "The Future of the Discipline of Missiology," ASM Conference, June 20-23, 2013, Wheaton, IL.

² The terminology of "faithful presence" was introduced by James Davidson Hunter, *To Change the World* (Oxford University Press) 2010.

The *IJFM* is published in the name of the International Student Leaders Coalition for Frontier Missions, a fellowship of younger leaders committed to the purposes of the twin consultations of Edinburgh 1980: The World Consultation on Frontier Missions and the International Student Consultation on Frontier Missions. As an expression of the ongoing concerns of Edinburgh 1980, the *IJFM* seeks to:

- ☞ promote intergenerational dialogue between senior and junior mission leaders;
- ☞ cultivate an international fraternity of thought in the development of frontier missiology;
- ☞ highlight the need to maintain, renew, and create mission agencies as vehicles for frontier missions;
- ☞ encourage multidimensional and interdisciplinary studies;
- ☞ foster spiritual devotion as well as intellectual growth; and
- ☞ advocate "A Church for Every People."

Mission frontiers, like other frontiers, represent boundaries or barriers beyond which we must go yet beyond which we may not be able to see clearly and boundaries which may even be disputed or denied. Their study involves the discovery and evaluation of the unknown or even the reevaluation of the known. But unlike other frontiers, mission frontiers is a subject specifically concerned to explore and exposit areas and ideas and insights related to the glorification of God in all the nations (peoples) of the world, "to open their eyes, to turn them from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God." (Acts 26:18)

Subscribers and other readers of the *IJFM* (due to ongoing promotion) come from a wide variety of backgrounds. Mission professors, field missionaries, young adult mission mobilizers, college librarians, mission executives, and mission researchers all look to the *IJFM* for the latest thinking in frontier missiology.